

THE PREWRATH RAPTURE THEORY

INTRODUCTION

Most premillennial believers (whether pretribulational, midtribulational, posttribulational or “prewrath”) share many common prophetic views. These would include the following: 1) A more literal, futurist hermeneutic is applied to key prophetic passages. 2) Daniel’s 70th week (Dan. 9:24-27) will be a future period of seven years. 3) The coming *Day of the Lord* will include a time of God’s wrath. 4) The Rapture will be prewrath.¹ 5) Christ’s Second Coming² will be premillennial. However, some hermeneutical and exegetical differences have led to other differences which are quite significant: They have to do primarily with: a) the meaning of, and the relationship between, the Church and Israel, the Olivet Discourse and Revelation, the Rapture and Second Coming, b) the nature, timing and duration of key periods such as the *70th week* of Daniel, the *beginning of sorrows*, the *Great Tribulation*, and the *Day of the Lord*, and c) the timing of the Rapture.

The prewrath view discussed in this paper is a rather *unique* form which did not come onto the church history scene until about 1990 with the publication of a book entitled *The Prewrath Rapture of the Church: A new understanding of the Rapture, the Tribulation, and the Second Coming*.³ This paper attempts to 1) briefly define the prewrath view, 2) clarify some differences between the pretribulational and prewrath view and 3) provide a brief scriptural basis for the pretribulational position.

1. THE 70TH WEEK OF DANIEL IN RELATION TO TRIBULATION AND WRATH

Prewrath view: A basic prewrath claim is that commentators have “made a fundamental error” since they “have not generally understood that there are *three* sections to the seventieth week.”⁴ The three sections of this seven-year, prophetic week (of years) are as follows: 1) The first half — called *the beginning of sorrows* (Mt. 24:5-8; Rev. 6:1-8), 2) The third quarter — *the Great Tribulation* (Mt. 24:21; Rev. 6:9-11), and 3) the last quarter — *the Day of the Lord* (Rev. 8:1ff).⁵ The Rapture, which follows the Great Tribulation, is thought to usher in “the Day of the Lord” or *time of God’s wrath*. From this perspective the above view is *prewrath*, but *posttribulational*. To distinguish it from the “midtribulational” view, it may be best to describe it as the “three-quarter tribulational” view.

Prewrath teaching attempts to prove that the 70th week of Daniel is not characterized exclusively by either tribulation or God’s wrath. These claims are made: To use the “term *the tribulation period* ... as a synonym for the seventieth week of the book of Daniel ... has no biblical justification In a prophetic context, [the word *tribulation*] is used to describe only the period of time that begins in the *middle* of Daniel’s seventieth week ...” after the

¹ It is “solidly affirmed by almost all of pre-, mid-, and posttribulational persuasion that the rapture will be ‘prewrath.’” Gerald B. Stanton, “A Review of [Rosenthal’s,] *The Prewrath Rapture of the Church*,” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 148:589 (Jan 91) 90-111.

² In this paper, “Second Coming” refers **not** to the rapture but to Christ’s coming for His millennial reign on earth.

³ All quotes from this book by Marvin Rosenthal will be footnoted with the author’s name and page number. Although Rosenthal was the first to publish on this subject, he had been deeply influenced into his new position by his friend, Bob Van Kampen, who later wrote his own books on the subject. Van Kampen’s main book, *The Sign*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books) has been printed in three editions, 1992, 1999 and 2000.

⁴ Rosenthal, 233.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 60-61. The duration of these last two quarters is not precise, but only approximate.

beginning of sorrows period and before the *Day of the Lord* period.⁶ “There is no basis for calling a particular period of time characterized by pressure, affliction, or anguish the Tribulation period. And more importantly ... most of that difficult seven-year period cannot be directly attributed to action by God or be properly defined as the time of God’s wrath”⁷ These distinctions are very crucial to many prewrath promoters who believe that the “use of the phrase *tribulation period* ... creates, at the very least, a built-in bias for pretribulationism. Therefore, the seventieth week of Daniel, a term with biblical justification, is preferred.”⁸

Pretribulational View: All 70 weeks (of years), including the 70th week, “have been decreed” especially for Israel and Jerusalem (Dan. 9:24a). Israel is the primary focus of God’s program for the 70th week. That is why the Church is never included or mentioned in either the 69 weeks or the 70th week. In contrast to the prewrath view, it is more biblically sound to recognize a division of the 70th week into two sections rather than three. Biblical references to time in connection with the 70th week are references only to the whole week, the first half or the last half. The week will commence when the Antichrist, “the prince who is to come ... will make a firm covenant with the many for one week” — possibly a deceptive treaty involving Israel to finally solve “the middle-east crisis.” But after three and a half years he will break the covenant with his abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel (9:27) and by Jesus (Mt. 24:15). This will bring on the final three and one-half year period referred to as the “time of Jacob’s trouble” or the *Great Tribulation* (Mt. 24:21).⁹

The whole 70th week of Daniel can be legitimately and scripturally described as a period of *tribulation* as well as a time of God’s wrath. One of God’s primary purposes for this entire seven-year period is “to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins” (Dan. 9:24).¹⁰ This will no doubt involve God’s judgment and wrath which will make it a time of severe tribulation for all people. The New Testament term used for tribulation (Gr. *thlipsis*) in Matthew 24:21 and 29, is also used in Matthew 24:9 (see NASB, NKJV) to describe events during “the first three and one-half years,” which, according to the prewrath view, is referred to as *the beginning of sorrows*, prior to any tribulation period).¹¹ And certainly these events are “in a prophetic context” describing tribulation (*thlipsis*) even though preceding the time of more intense affliction referred to as *the Great Tribulation* (Mt. 24:21, 29). As described above, obviously the second half of the week is a time of *great tribulation* (Mt. 24:21) or “a time of trouble/distress” for Israel (Dan. 12:1 *thlipsis*, LXX). The Day of the Lord, too, is described not only as a day of God’s wrath but “a day of trouble/distress” (Zeph. 1:15 *thlipsis*, LXX). Isaiah describes

⁶ Ibid., 103, 105.

⁷ Ibid., 106-107. However, Van Kampen speaks of the 70th week as “the seven-year tribulation period [which] will begin when this man who becomes Antichrist makes a seven-year treaty with Israel.” Robert Van Kampen, *The Rapture Question Answered*, (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, a division of Baker Book House, 1997) 38.

⁸ Rosenthal, 107.

⁹ Some, such as L. S. Chafer, K. S. Wuest, A. G. Fruchtenbaum and other pretribulationists, refer to the entire 70th week of seven years as “the time of Jacob’s trouble” and “The Great Tribulation.”

¹⁰ See also Dan. 12:5-7; Isa. 13:9; 24:19-20; Eze. 20:34-38.

¹¹ It is acknowledged in prewrath teaching that the events of Matthew 24:9-10 context occur “during the first three and one-half years.” See Rosenthal, 237.

the Day of the Lord not only as a day of God's wrath, but a day of tribulation when all men will be "terrified" and suffer "pains and anguish" as a "woman in labor" (Isa. 13:6-13, NASB). There is biblical justification for considering the full seven-year period (the 70th week) as a special time of *tribulation*.

2. THE BEGINNING OF SORROWS (literally Birth Pangs)

Prewrath view: In prewrath teaching *the beginning of sorrows* as described in Matthew 24:5-8 coincides with Revelation 6:1-8, which also "chronicles the 'beginning' birth pangs (the first three and one half years) through the opening of the first four seals."¹² And it is emphasized repeatedly that the "first part of the seventieth week is not the wrath of God."¹³ And furthermore the prewrath claim is made that "the first three and one-half years are not part of the Tribulation period" even though the period is described as *the beginning of sorrows* (or *birth pangs*).¹⁴

Pretribulational View: Because of textual differences between Matthew 24:5-8 and Revelation 6:1-8, the former may not even be a part of the 70th week. Matthew 24:5-8 may merely be a description "of the prevailing conditions on earth at the close of the Church Age, before the rapture."¹⁵ But regardless, several biblical authors have described a mother's *birth pangs* by using terms such as *tsarah/tsar* (Heb.) and *thlipsis* (Gr.). Both of these words are translated in the KJV and other English versions by synonyms such as adversity, affliction, anguish, distress, persecution, sorrow, tribulation and trouble. The LXX often translates *tsar/tsarah* (Heb.) as *thlipsis* (Gr.). In using this term, Jeremiah portrayed the coming "time of Jacob's *trouble*" as birth pangs (Jer. 30:4-7). Jesus likened a coming time to the *thlipsis* or tribulation of a mother's birth pangs (Jn. 16:20-21). God has used a mother's birth pangs, whether just "beginning" or later on when they are more intense, to serve as a descriptive picture of the coming seven years of tribulation. If the first three and half years may be described as a period of time called the *beginning of birth pangs*, then it is also a period of time that justifiably can be referred to as a period of *tribulation* which only worsens during the Great Tribulation. This is particularly true if, as the prewrath view postulates, Matthew 24:5-8 covers the same time period as Revelation 6:1-8. For instance, any literal interpretation of the fourth seal judgment (Rev. 6:7-8) would clearly reveal an incredibly intense time of severe tribulation for no doubt billions of earth dwellers.¹⁶ The *beginning of birth pangs* is not only a period of *tribulation*, but it is also a period of *divine wrath* — especially as revealed in the seven-sealed scroll judgments of God which may include the seven trumpet judgments (Rev. 8:1-2), and the bowl judgments as well.¹⁷

3. THE SEAL JUDGMENTS AND GOD'S WRATH

Prewrath view: The prewrath claim is made that it cannot "be demonstrated that the opening of the seals reflects an outpouring of God's wrath. Not until the opening of the sixth

¹² Ibid., 151, 179.

¹³ Rosenthal, "Imminence: Does the Bible Teach an Any-Moment Rapture?" *Zion's Fire*, Aug-Sept 1990, 9.

¹⁴ Rosenthal, 106-107.

¹⁵ Stanton, "A Review of *The Prewrath Rapture of the Church*, 94.

¹⁶ The term "earth dwellers" is a designation for persistent unbelievers during the tribulation. See: [The Meaning of Earth Dwellers and the Book of Revelation](#) by Thomas Ice.

¹⁷ Rosenthal (p. 193) also acknowledges this. See chart in DTS, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, NT Edition, 950.

seal, which initiates cosmic disturbance, does God begin to actively intervene in the affairs of men. With the opening of the seventh seal His wrath is about to commence [The] seals are not God's wrath; they are God's promise of eternal protection during *man's* wrath, a wrath precipitated by the Antichrist who is empowered by Satan (Rev. 13:4)."¹⁸ The pre-wrath teaching is that "the first five seals [Rev. 6:1-11] relate to man's activity under the controlling influence of Satan. God's wrath has not yet begun."¹⁹ It is clearly stated that "God's wrath cannot be understood to include the first six seals ... God's wrath does not start until the opening of the seventh seal."²⁰ So even the terrifying cosmic disturbances of the sixth seal supposedly do not indicate God's wrath, but only *the beginning* of a time when God will "actively intervene in the affairs of men."

Pretribulational View: The opening of the seven seals (Rev. 6:1-8:1) constitutes the first of three, sequential, septet series of judgments in which God's wrath is poured out on the world of the ungodly. And this terrible manifestation of God's wrath obviously will result in very painful tribulation for people — including those who become believers during that time.²¹ God, the Father "committed all judgment unto [God] the Son" and has "given Him authority to execute judgment also because He is the Son of Man" (Jn. 5:22, 27; Dan.7:13-14). This is why the only one worthy to take the scroll from God's hand in Heaven to open it "and to loose it's seals" is none other than Jesus Christ Himself (Rev. 5). There was "no man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth [who] was able to open the scroll" (Rev. 5:3) containing all seven of the seals. All seal judgments originate from Heaven, the same place where the trumpet and vial/bowl judgments originate (Rev. 8:2; 15:1-8). The first four seal judgments are initiated by the same four "living creatures" described in Revelation 4:6-9 who come from God's presence in Heaven. The voice that speaks from the center of the four living creatures (Rev. 6:6) must likely be either the voice of the Father who sits upon the throne or the Son, the slain Lamb (Rev. 5:6-7). The seal judgments are *God's* wrath, not simply *man's* or *Satan's* wrath.

Then, too, the first four seal judgments of Revelation six, including sword/war (6:3-4), famine (6:5-6) and death/pestilence/beasts (6:7-8) are reminders of numerous times when God poured out His wrath on Jerusalem, Israel and the nations.²² The four judgments of the fourth seal are the same as the "four evil/severe judgments" of sword, famine, death/pestilence and wild beasts that God promised to send on Jerusalem as the expression of the outpouring of His wrath/fury (Eze. 5:5-17, 14:12-21). The cosmic disturbances and earth-transforming events of the sixth seal (Rev. 6:12-17) cannot be manufactured by man. They will be a clear demonstration of God's wrath. In fact, after the opening of the first six seals all men will know for sure whose wrath is involved! That's why they will cry in terror and say to the mountains and rocks, "*Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb. For the great day of their wrath has come*" (Rev.

¹⁸ Ibid., 140-141, 145.

¹⁹ Ibid., 247.

²⁰ Ibid., 171-172.

²¹ God's wrath/judgment on unbelievers often results in tribulation for believers. Throughout Israel's history, believing Jews including Joshua, Daniel, and others, have often suffered tribulation during God's numerous judgments on unbelieving Israel.

²² See Lev. 26:14-31; Num. 11:33; 16:46; Deut. 11:17; 28:20-29, 35-42, 59-62; 32:24-25; 2 Chron. 29:8-10; Jer. 15:1-4, 16:4; 19:7-9; 21:5-7; 42:16-22; 44:11-13; Eze. 4:11-17; 5:8-17; 6:11-13a; 7:8, 14-15; 33:27; 38:16-23 and numerous others.

6:15-16 NASB).²³ God's terrible wrath will obviously result in much agonizing tribulation for mankind — whether at the hands of Satan, Antichrist, man or directly by God Himself. All seven seals are an integral part of the one scroll. And all the trumpet and bowl judgments are included in the seventh seal. The first five seals are just as much a part of “the wrath of the Lamb” as the last two seals. And, as many have noted, any rapture *after* the first six seals could not rightly be called a “prewrath rapture.”

The rider of the white horse (first seal) may represent the Antichrist, but this does *not* mean that through him (the Antichrist) God will not manifest His awesome wrath in that day. In fact, the prewrath view clearly proclaims that the trumpet judgments are the manifestation of God's wrath (which indeed they are), yet the fifth trumpet involves demonic creatures from the bottomless pit (Rev. 9:1-11). God obviously wills the destruction of the Harlot of Babylon, but He has decreed to manifest His wrath through the wrath of the Beast (Rev. 17:16-17) who “shall ascend out of the bottomless pit [abyss] (17:8).” God has often, through Satan and those who follow him, manifested His judgment/wrath against sin. And as a result, throughout world history mankind has reaped much affliction and tribulation. To “show His wrath and make His power known,” God sovereignly *raised up* Pharaoh, “a vessel of wrath,” (Rom. 9:17-22) who became the source of severe *tribulation* for thousands of people — especially Jews. God used the ungodly, heathen nation of Assyria as the *rod of his anger* to punish rebellious Israel, *the people of His wrath* (Isa. 10:5-6). Likewise, God Himself sovereignly *raised up* the vile, wicked, ruthless, idolatrous Chaldeans as the instruments of His *wrath* to punish His own chosen people, who consequently suffered severe tribulation (Jer. 32:28-36; Hab. 1:5-11).

4. THE GREAT TRIBULATION

Prewrath view: In prewrath teaching there is no unfulfilled prophetic *tribulation period* other than the Great Tribulation. Prewrath claims: “The Bible teaches that the Great Tribulation (“the time of Jacob's trouble”) begins in the middle of the seven-year period but does not continue until its end. The Great Tribulation is cut short and followed by cosmic disturbance (Mt. 24:22; Mk. 13:24-25).”²⁴ The impression is given that the Great Tribulation is thought to occur only during the fifth seal, prior to the cosmic disturbances of the sixth seal. For it is clearly stated that “With the opening of the fifth seal [Rev. 6:9-11], the Great Tribulation commences ... [and the] sixth seal is opened after the Great Tribulation.”²⁵ However reference is also made to “specific cosmic disturbance that occurs inside of the Tribulation period with the opening of the sixth seal.”²⁶ And it is only after the cosmic disturbances of the sixth seal that “the Day of the Lord starts with the opening of the seventh seal.” Then too, “Prophetically ... the Great Tribulation speaks of man's wrath against man, not God's wrath against man God's wrath cannot be understood to include the first six seals ... [because] the word wrath is restricted to the events of the trumpets and bowls and, therefore, exempts

²³ “In the *indicative*, the aorist usually indicates past time” [Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 555]. Prewrath teaching argues that “has come” should be understood as “it will begin” or “it is about to occur” in the near future at the 7th seal. See Rosenthal, 179-180. Yet, even in Revelation, although John uses the same word eleven other times, it is not once used of a future event. See A. G. Fruchtenbaum, *A Review of the Prewrath Rapture of the Church by Marvin Rosenthal*, 29.

²⁴ Rosenthal, 293.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 179, 152-153.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 150.

the first six seals.”²⁷ Even though it is clearly stated in prewrath teaching that “The seals are not [or cannot be] God’s wrath,”²⁸ apparently the *seventh seal* must be understood to be an exception.

This claim is repeatedly emphasized: “The Great Tribulation which begins in the middle of the seventieth week “does not run to the end of that week. It is cut short [Mat. 24:22] The shortening of the Great Tribulation to less than three and one-half years is one of the most important truths to be grasped if the chronology of end-times events is to be understood. It literally is the key that reveals the sequence to Matthew 24-25 and the chronology of the book of Revelation with the opening of the seals, trumpets, and bowls.”²⁹ Prewrath teaching also emphasizes that “the church will indeed go through the great tribulation by Antichrist.”³⁰ However, the *faithful church* will apparently not suffer as greatly as the *compromising church* who “will experience the full force of Antichrist’s persecution.”³¹

Pretribulational View: At least the last half of the 70th week will be the time of greatest tribulation — especially for Israel.³² *Jeremiah* declared that the time of Jacob’s trouble will be so great “there is none like it” (Jer. 30:7). *Daniel* made it clear that this “time of trouble/distress” would be “such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time” (Dan. 12:1). When *Joel* was describing “the day of the Lord/Jehovah” he wrote, “There has never been anything like it, nor will there be again after it to the years of many generations” (Joel 2:2). In speaking of the Great Tribulation *Jesus* said that “there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall be” (Mat. 24:21). Each of these four men speak of incomparable and unparalleled times of incredible trouble. So how could they be talking about *different* times? They all refer to the Great Tribulation of at least the last half of the tribulation week. And if the Great Tribulation merely represents only man’s or Satan’s wrath and not *God’s* wrath (as presented in the prewrath view) then it would have to be concluded that man’s/Satan’s wrath during the Great Tribulation is greater than God’s wrath during the Day of the Lord’s wrath. This is neither possible nor scriptural since *Jesus* clearly declared that there will never be a time of suffering comparable to that of the Great Tribulation. The Great Tribulation is a manifestation of God’s wrath during the coming Day of the Lord just as prophesied.

Jesus said that the great tribulation of those days would be so severe that “unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved, but for the sake of the elect those days shall be cut short” (Mat. 24:21-22 NASB). When had they been cut short? The days of the great tribulation *had been cut short* long ago when, in God’s foreknowledge, He decreed that this prophetic time of Antichrist’s persecution should be cut short to precisely 1,260

²⁷ Ibid., 105, 171.

²⁸ Ibid., 143, 145, 173.

²⁹ Ibid., 110, 112.

³⁰ Robert Van Kampen, *The Sign*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1992) 287.

³¹ Ibid., 246.

³² Anti-Semitism will only increase until the Antichrist armies of all nations are finally gathered against Jerusalem for Armageddon, “the mother of all wars,” just prior to our Lord’s coming (Zech. 12:2-9; 13:8-14:3; Rev. 16:12-16; 19:19).

days and no longer — with a purpose for the survival of at least a remnant of His elect Israel. This most severe time of great tribulation will last precisely three and a half years (Dan. 7:25; 12:1, 7; Rev. 12:14), or 42 months (Rev. 11:2; 13:5) or 1260 days (Rev. 11:3; 13:5)³³ just as He promised.

5. THE SECOND COMING AND THE LAST TRUMP

Prewrath View: These claims are made: “*Immediately* after the Great Tribulation, there will be cosmic disturbances; these phenomena will signal the coming of the Son of Man from heaven This coming commences *before* the end of the seventieth week and is consummated after the end of the seventieth week (Rev. 19:11) The cosmic disturbances concerning which the Lord taught (Mt. 24:29) and which parallel the sixth seal (Rev. 6:12-13) signal the coming of the Son of man in heaven. This sign will occur *after* the Great Tribulation but before the end of the seventieth week Cosmic disturbance will precede Christ’s coming to rapture the church and judge the wicked.”³⁴ “The often-heard suggestion that Christ will come first *for* His church and then return to earth a second time seven years later *with* His church is an assumption with no biblical evidence to substantiate it Christ’s coming and Rapture occur after the events of Matthew 24:4-28.”³⁵

Prewrath insists that the Lord’s coming “*parousia* is speaking of the totality of that glorious series of events ... [It] *is a comprehensive whole*. There is only *one* Second Coming. It includes the Rapture of the church, the outpouring of God’s wrath during the Day of the Lord, and Christ’s physical return in glory. [The] word *coming (parousia)* ... means a coming and continuing presence The Lord’s coming is consistently portrayed as a singular event.”³⁶ But even though the prewrath view speaks of *only one Second Coming*, it needs to be noted that it actually “teaches *four* future comings of Christ within the boundaries of the *one* Second Coming.”³⁷ They are timed as follows: *First*, He will come for the Rapture of His Bride (Old Testament saints and church saints) between the 6th and 7th seal and take her to Heaven. *Second*, after the end of the 70th week and at the beginning of the 30-day reclamation period (Dan. 12:11), He will leave His Bride, and come again for at least six days on earth to bring salvation to Israel and to reclaim the rule of the earth to God before He returns to His Bride for approximately another 24 days in Heaven. *Third*, after the seventh bowl judgment at the end of the 30-day reclamation period, He will come again, without His Bride but with His holy angels, to defeat Antichrist and his forces at Armageddon. After a 45-day restoration period, He “will return to heaven to deliver the kingdom of earth to God and to receive the rule of the whole earth from God.” *Fourth*, after several days He will come again “with His Bride (the Old Testament saints and the church saints) to rule His worldwide millennial kingdom.”³⁸

The prewrath view also declares, “*When Christ speaks of ‘the end of the age’* [Mt. 13:39-40; 24:3] *or just simply as ‘the end’* [Mt. 24:13-14], *He is referring to the Day of the Lord*”

³³ These times are in accord with the Jewish yearly calendar of 360 days.

³⁴ Rosenthal, 110-111.

³⁵ Ibid., 223-224.

³⁶ Ibid., 217, 221-223.

³⁷ Showers, op. cit., 83.

³⁸ Showers, op. cit., 83. Showers refers to Van Kampen, *The Sign*, pp. 304, 331, 344, 360, 369, 370-379, 394, 422-23.

(author's emphasis).³⁹ The *end of the age* is also the same phenomena as *the last trump* (1 Cor. 15:51; 1 Thess. 4:16). It is claimed that “the *last trump* will be nothing more, nothing less, and nothing different than the final, climactic, eschatological outpouring of the wrath of God As the seventh seal is opened, the seven trumpet and bowl judgments progressively unfold. They are part of a comprehensive whole. Collectively, they are God's Day of the Lord wrath, His final eschatological judgment — the last trump. Since the last trump arises out of the seventh seal, and the Rapture ... occurs at the last trump ... the Rapture must occur at the opening of the seventh seal.”⁴⁰

Pretribulational View: Although both the Rapture and the Second Coming are referred to simply as a future coming of Christ, the two events are uniquely distinct. Obvious distinctions are clearly evident between those passages that refer to the Rapture of the church⁴¹ and those that refer to the Second Coming to establish His earthly Kingdom.⁴² It is difficult to know why prewrath teachers are so insistent on “*only one coming*” while they speak of four distinct comings. To emphasize the Lord's coming “as a singular event” yet occurring as a “glorious series of events” that include all the events of the entire period known as the “Day of the Lord” only confuses the issue. It seems much better to recognize that the same term “coming (*parousia*)” is simply a term used for two distinct events as indicated by the context. And how is it possible for prewrath promoters to insist on Christ's “coming and *continuous presence*,” when in body, He is *neither* continuously present on earth or in Heaven *nor* continuously present with His Bride on earth or in Heaven until after His fourth, future coming?

It seems more “plain and simple” to make a clear distinction between first, the singular event of the Rapture when Christ returns in the air for His Bride, the church saints, alive or resurrected (1 Thess. 4:13-18; 1 Cor. 15:51-53) and second, the singular event of the Second Coming when Christ returns to earth *with* His Bride and angels for His millennial reign (Mat. 24:30-31; Rev. 19:11-21).⁴³ At His Second Coming, God's dispersed remnant of His “elect/chosen” people, Israel, will be gathered to Him in the land as prophesied.⁴⁴ And this will be after all the seal events, including the cosmic disturbances (Mat. 24:29) during the 70th week. The Old Testament saints and the Apostles during Christ's incarnation understood clearly only the Second Coming, not the Rapture-Resurrection as a distinct event revealed to the Apostle Paul (1 Cor. 15:51). After the Rapture the Bride will go wherever Christ goes (1 Thess. 4:17). That will be a *true continuous presence*.

There is no biblical basis for the prewrath view that “the last trump/trumpet” (1 Cor. 15:52; 1 Thess. 4:16) is the same phenomena as “the end of the age” (Mat. 13:40) which includes

³⁹ Van Kampen, *The Prewrath Rapture Position Explained Plain & Simple* (Grand Haven MI: Sola Scriptura, 1999) 22.

⁴⁰ Rosenthal, 193-194.

⁴¹ Rapture passages: Jn.14:1-3; 1 Cor.15:51-53; Phil. 3:20-21; 1 Th. 4:13-18; 2 Th. 2:1; 2 Tim. 4:1,8; Tit. 2:13; 1 Jn. 2:28-3:2.

⁴² Second Coming passages: Zech. 14:1-15; Mt. 24:15-31; Mk. 13:14-27; Lk. 21:25-28; 1 Thess. 3:13; Jude 14-15; Rev. 1:7; 19:11-21.

⁴³ Some pretribulational followers prefer to view the Rapture and Second Coming as two distinct *aspects* of the Second Coming.

⁴⁴ See Zech. 2:4-6; Isa. 11:11-12; 27:12-13; 43:5-7; Jer. 30:2, 10, 8; 32:37; Eze. 11:16-18; 20:33-35; 34:11-16; 36:24; etc.

all the trumpet and bowl judgments of the final “eschatological outpouring of the wrath of God,” referred to as “the day of the Lord.” There is no mention of God’s wrath in the context of either 1 Corinthians 15:52 or 1 Thessalonians 4:16. On the contrary, there is a joyful, glorious resurrection and rapture of all the church-age saints delivering us from God’s wrath to come (1 Thess. 1:10; 5:9). The blast of the trumpet is described in one Greek word translated as “the trumpet will sound.” There is no hint that this trumpet sound will last for many months.⁴⁵ On the contrary, Paul deliberately described the events associated with the sound as happening instantaneously, “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.” It will be the last trumpet sound the church saints will hear before their glorious rapture to meet the Lord in the air.⁴⁶

The Rapture precedes the Day of the Lord which will commence with the seven-year tribulation period. This terrible time of God’s wrath has nothing to do with the church, which will have been raptured. The church will be *kept from* this coming *hour of testing* (Rev. 3:10; 1 Thess. 1:10; 5:9) described so vividly in Revelation 4-19 where the *church* is never mentioned even once. Contextual alternation of the pronouns “they” with “ye/we/us” (1 Thess. 5:1-9 KJV) indicates that the church will not be here on earth during the Day of the Lord’s wrath.

6. THE DAY OF THE LORD IN RELATION TO AN IMMINENT RAPTURE

Prewrath view: This claim is made: “Perhaps here is the ultimate error of pre-tribulation rapturism. It holds out the false hope of *imminent* rapture, instead of the true hope of *expectant* rapture. By *expectant* rapture it is meant that every generation since the first century could have been the generation that entered the seventieth week to experience the Rapture.”⁴⁷ The prewrath view teaches that since there are several events that must occur just prior to the Day of the Lord which is equivalent to the one future coming, which includes the Rapture, the Rapture cannot possibly be imminent. These events include: 1) The cosmic disturbances will occur “*before* the great and terrible day of the Lord” (Joel 2:31). The claim is made that “the doctrine of imminency is destroyed by the question posed by the disciples ... ‘*What shall be the sign of thy coming [parousia]?*’” (Mt. 24:3).⁴⁸ According to the prewrath view, the cosmic disturbances (Mt. 24:29) are equated with Joel 2:31 and Rev. 6:12-14. They will be the sign of the *end of the age*, and “will serve as a warning to the unsaved that the Day-of-the-Lord judgment is imminent.”⁴⁹ “Since the sign must precede the coming, and the Rapture is related to the coming, the Rapture cannot be signless. And imminency ... is once more discredited.”⁵⁰ 2) The sending of Elijah will occur “*before* the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord” (Mal. 4:5). And “if the Day of the Lord

⁴⁵ The fifth trumpet judgment alone will last for a period of five months (Rev. 9:5).

⁴⁶ For a further helpful discussion of “the last trump” see Showers, *Maranatha, Our Lord Come*, 259-268 and Fruchtenbaum, *A Review of The Prewrath Rapture of the Church*, 46-49.

⁴⁷ Rosenthal, 282.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 224.

⁴⁹ Showers, *The Prewrath Rapture View*, 94. Showers refers to Van Kampen, *The Sign*, 268. But if these cosmic disturbances are to “serve as a warning to the unsaved that the Day-of-the-Lord judgment is imminent,” how can it be said that the unsaved will be living “with no sense of impending judgment, with no awareness that deity is about to visit humanity in judgment” (Rosenthal, 219, 221) — especially in light of Rev. 6:16 and the incredible events of the preceding seals?

⁵⁰ Rosenthal, 224-225.

begins at the beginning of the seventieth week, [as Pretribulationism teaches], imminence is destroyed.”⁵¹ 3) The apostasy and revealing of “the man of sin” will occur *first*, before the day of the Lord comes (2 Thess. 2:2-3). Therefore, it is claimed, “Paul did not teach the Thessalonians that the Rapture was imminent. Quite the contrary, he taught that the apostasy must occur first, and that the man of sin must be revealed (2 Thess. 2:3).”⁵²

Pretribulationist View: **FIRST**, concerning the cosmic disturbances: The prewrath failure to make clear distinctions between the church and Israel and between the Rapture and the Second Coming has led to much confusion and complexity. “The Olivet discourse is Jewish in character.”⁵³ But, consistent with this, is the fact that it deals with the future of Israel, not the church. As such, it concerns the Second Coming, not the Rapture.⁵⁴ One of the major distinctions between the Rapture and the Second Coming is that the former requires no particular preceding signs, whereas the latter does follow certain events and signs including the Rapture and all the horrendous events prophesied for the 70th week. The disciples’ question, “What shall be the sign of thy coming and of the end of the age?” had to do with the only Messianic “coming” they knew about, namely, His coming to establish His Kingdom. It had nothing to do with the Rapture, an event they had never heard of before. And Jesus told them of the coming days of tribulation including the cosmic disturbances, after which He would come “with power and great glory.” Matthew 24:30 is not about the Rapture but about His Second Coming to reign and rule. Jesus did make mention of the Rapture later (Jn. 14:3), but the rapture “mystery,” unrevealed previously, was revealed later yet to the Apostle Paul (1 Cor. 15:51-52). The cosmic disturbances (Matt. 24:29; Joel 2:31; 3:15) precede our Lord’s future glorious Second Coming to earth (Zech. 14:4), not the Rapture. These cosmic disturbances will occur sometime *after* the cosmic disturbances of the sixth seal, the fourth trumpet, the fifth trumpet, and the sixth bowl, but 1000 years *before* those that occur just prior to “the new heavens and the new earth” (2 Pet. 3:10-13).

SECOND, concerning the coming of Elijah: In contrast to the prewrath view,⁵⁵ there is not just one *day of the Lord* in the Scripture. There are many synonymous phrases used for “the day of the Lord.”⁵⁶ And its meaning must be determined by the context of these various phrases. For instance, *Jeremiah* lamented the contemporary sixth century BC destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon in that past “day of the Lord’s anger” (Lam. 1:12; 2:1, 21-22). *Ezekiel* referred to that same time as “the day of the wrath of the Lord” (Eze. 7:19) and “the day of the Lord” (13:5). Nebuchadnezzar’s destruction of Egypt was another “day of the Lord” (Eze. 30:3). In the days of King Josiah, *Zephaniah* prophesied of the soon coming great day of the Lord (Zeph. 1:14) on Judah (Ch. 1) and the surrounding nations (2:1-15). Babylon’s overthrow by the Medes was another “day of the Lord” which was “at hand” in that day (Isa. 13:6). This *day of the Lord*, like most of the others, prophetically prefigured

⁵¹ Ibid., 159.

⁵² Ibid., 249.

⁵³ Ibid., 60.

⁵⁴ This is a major difference we have with the prewrath assumption that the “Olivet Discourse is referring to the rapture of God’s elect ...” understood to be the church. Van Kampen, *Prewrath Rapture Position ...*, 49.

⁵⁵ It is claimed that the prophets “knew of only one such event” called “the **day** of the Lord.” Rosenthal, 129.

⁵⁶ See Zephaniah 1:7-18 for a sampling of a few phrases, including the day of the Lord’s Sacrifice (8), in the same day (9), in that day (10), at that time (12), the great day of the Lord (14), and a day of wrath, distress, desolation, darkness, etc. (15).

the coming great Day of the Lord.

It is true that in Scripture “the day of the Lord” is usually associated with God’s wrath either in past judgments of the nations (including Israel and Judah), or during the future 70th week of Daniel. Yet Peter even speaks of a coming *Day of the Lord* in which history will close with the dissolving of the present earth and heavens (2 Pet. 3:7, 10-12) after the Millennium. Most who hold the pretribulational view believe that the Day of the Lord is at times associated with millennial blessings as well.⁵⁷ In such contexts the day of the Lord has “a broad sense” including both the tribulation and the Millennium. Grammatically in some passages “in that day” refers back to *the day of the Lord*.⁵⁸ Writing of the Millennium (Zech. 14:6-9), Zechariah uses the phrase, “*in that day*,” which must refer back to *the day of the Lord* he writes of in 14:1-5, which has to do with our Lord’s coming and the battle of Armageddon. In the grammatical context what other day could “that day” relate to?

In the same way, Joel relates his discussion on the millennial blessings (Joel 3:17-21) to “*the great and terrible day of the Lord*” (Joel 2:30-32; 3:9-16), which also speaks of His coming and Armageddon at the end of the tribulation. In these contexts, the yet future “*great and terrible day of the Lord*” seems to occur with “a narrow sense” referring more specifically to our Lord’s Second Coming and the battle of Armageddon in “*that great day of God Almighty*” (Rev. 16:12-16). Using the same phrase as Joel, Malachi foretold of God’s sending Elijah before the coming of “*the great and terrible day of the Lord*” (Mal. 4:1-5). This would seem to indicate that sometime prior to our Lord’s Second Coming and Armageddon (rather than the Rapture or the 70th week), Elijah will come, regardless of whether or not he is one of the two witnesses (Rev. 11:3).⁵⁹

THIRD, concerning the future apostasy and revelation of Antichrist (2 Thess. 2:3): The context clearly indicates that Paul must have taught the Thessalonian believers that the Rapture (2 Thess. 2:1; 1 Thess. 1:10; 4:13-5:11) would occur prior to the Day of the Lord’s wrath, referring to the seven-year tribulation period. Because of their own tribulation along with false teaching, they had become troubled thinking that “the Day of the Lord has come” (2 Thess. 2:2 NASB) already. To comfort them and clarify their confusion, Paul made it clear that 1) the restrainer of lawlessness had not yet been removed, and 2) the man of sin had not yet been revealed. Obviously, since the Rapture and onset of the Day of the Lord wrath had not come, the Thessalonians could once again be comforted by “the blessed hope” of an imminent Rapture.

According to the prewrath view, there are several events that must precede the *broad* Day of the Lord. In other words, these events must take place before the 70th week of Daniel (aka the tribulation). They claim that if any or all of these events must happen before the tribulation, then that destroys the pretribulational rapture. However, their claim is based on a false premise. Many scholars have emphasized that the Rapture does not necessarily kick off the 70th week. It “is the signing of a covenant between Israel and the Antichrist

⁵⁷ The prewrath view: “There is no blessing associated with the Day of the Lord ... [which] in the Old Testament is exclusively a time of devastating judgment ... the Millennium cannot properly be included in the Day of the Lord.” Rosenthal, 126-27, 129.

⁵⁸ The context must determine the antecedent to the relative pronoun, *that*.

⁵⁹ For brief discussion of Elijah’s coming in relation to John the Baptist see Mal Couch, General Ed. *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1996), pp. 245-247 re “Malachi” article.

(Dan. 9:27). The Rapture comes sometime before that ... [and] saying that something comes before the seventieth week is not the same as saying that it comes before the Rapture.”⁶⁰ The prewrath theory requires the occurrence of at least eight converging events (all “before the seventh seal”) in a relatively short period of time. Such events include 1) the cosmic disturbances, 2) the coming of Elijah, 3) the Day of His wrath, 4) The sealing of the 144,000 Jews (Rev. 7:4-8), 5) The rapture of the Church, the great multitude (Rev. 7:9-17), 6) the last trump [or end of the age], 7) The apostacy of the Jews, and 8) the revealing of the Antichrist.⁶¹ Therefore, it should not be so incredulous that many pretribulationists believe that, between the Rapture and the 70th week, there will be some time — possibly a few minutes, hours, days, weeks, months or even years.⁶² And there could easily be a convergence of numerous events happening immediately or sometime after the Rapture and before the 70th week.

Although *the signs of the times* may indicate believers today are living in *the last days*, there are no prophetic events/signs that *must* take place before Jesus returns to rapture His Bride. He could come at any moment. This seems apparent partly for these reasons: 1) The Aramaic greeting, *Maranatha* “our Lord, come” indicates that the early church saints expected that the Lord could come at any time (1 Cor. 16:22). 2) While serving the Lord, the Thessalonians were *waiting* for the Lord Jesus to come “from Heaven ... *that is*, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.” (1 Thess. 1:10). 3) Paul’s use of “*we*” sounds like he included himself as among those who may still be alive and remaining “unto the coming of the Lord” to be “caught up” and “changed” by putting on incorruption or immortality with the resurrected saints who have passed away (1 Thess. 4:14-17; 1 Cor. 15:51). 4) The Scriptures exhort believers to be looking expectantly for our Lord’s return with no mention of any intervening prophetic events (Jn. 14:3; 1 Cor. 1:7; Phil. 4:5; Titus 2:13; 1 Jn. 2:28; James 5:8-9). 5) John heard Jesus Himself saying, “I am coming quickly [or swiftly, all at once]” (Rev. 3:11; 22:7, 12, 20). The Holy Spirit and the bride say, “Come ...” (Rev. 22:17). Along with John, believers pray, “Amen, Yes, Come Lord Jesus” (Rev. 22:20). None of these passages state that certain events must occur first.

The Thessalonian believers understood full well that “*the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night*” (1 Thess. 5:2). The thief, of course, deliberately comes without forewarning when he is least expected. How can Paul’s teaching be consistent with the prewrath insistence that a non-imminent Rapture, immediately followed the same day by the beginning of the Day of the Lord wrath, will be signaled by the cosmic disturbances of the sixth seal which is preceded by the other five seals?

CONCLUSION

The Rapture, which remains imminent, will be pretribulationist or occur before the Day of the

⁶⁰ Fruchtenbaum, “A Review of *The Prewrath Rapture of the Church* by Marvin Rosenthal,” 25.

⁶¹ Rosenthal, 149, 161, 177, 186, 194, 211 (See charts).

⁶² Fruchtenbaum has written that “the Rapture could come a number of years before the Tribulation.” (See Fruchtenbaum, “Israelology, Part 4 of 6,” *Chafer Theological Seminary Journal*, Jan. 2000, 42. Tim LaHaye believes that “there may be an intervening period of several years between the rapture and the start of the tribulation period.” Tim LaHaye, “The Prophetic Future of Iraq,” *Pre-Trib Perspectives*, 8:2, June 2003, 2.

Lord. There is no biblical basis for insisting that the Day of the Lord must begin with the opening/breaking of the seventh seal. It seems more consistent to understand the Day of the Lord as starting sometime after the Rapture at the beginning of the 70th week and concluding after the Millennium when the new heaven and new earth replaces the present heavens and earth (2 Pet. 3:10-13; Rev. 21:1). Christ's Second Coming will occur at the end of the 70th week and before the Millennium.

This paper has presented some areas of the *prewrath* doctrine that differs with the pretribulational view. These areas of doctrine and other features of Prewrath teaching are not adequately supported by the Scripture. A number of other prewrath doctrinal claims of concern which are not discussed in this paper, include these: 1) The parabolic *field* in which Satan plants the tares is interpreted to be "the kingdom of heaven" rather than "the world" as interpreted by Jesus (Mt. 13:38).⁶³ 2) It is claimed, "The Word of God teaches that the *restrainer* [2 Thess. 2:6] is the archangel, Michael" rather than either the Holy Spirit, or the church, or human government.⁶⁴ 3) The "*remnant of her* [the woman's] *seed*" (Rev. 12:17) is interpreted as "Christians, both Jewish and Gentile" rather than simply Jewish.⁶⁵ 4) Prewrath proponents attempt to find evidence to suggest "that the twenty-four *elders* [Rev. 4:4] represent redeemed Israel,"⁶⁶ not the church. 5) "'*Saints*' in this verse [1 Thess. 3:13] does not refer to believers ... [It] is a reference to angelic beings."⁶⁷ 6) "The *great multitude* [Rev. 7:9, 14] represents the true church which goes into the seventieth week of Daniel," or "the raptured church in heaven before the Day of the Lord commences" rather than tribulation saints martyred *after* the rapture of the church,⁶⁸ 7) "It is only the church of Philadelphia which is promised exemption from "the hour of temptation."⁶⁹ The "Supplementary Reading" to follow provide good sources for further insight on these and many other problem areas of the prewrath theories of recent years.

It is readily acknowledged that eschatology is a difficult area of biblical study. Understandably there is a wide range of differences in interpretation among godly, conservative evangelicals. Those who embrace a pretribulational position differ among themselves on non-essential details of interpretation of prophetic texts, but there is no biblical basis to abandon the traditional, dispensational views. Unfortunately, prewrath views are often presented in a strong, anti-pretribulational, militant spirit, which, if tolerated, could readily foster division. The future return of Christ includes: **first**, in His imminent, pretribulational return (the Rapture) for His church to take her to Heaven, and **second**, in His subsequent, premillennial, return (the Second Coming) with His

⁶³ Van Kampen, *The Sign*, 465-66.

⁶⁴ Rosenthal, 260. See also Van Kampen, *The Sign*, 199-200. Most of us identify the *restrainer* with the *Holy Spirit*.

⁶⁵ Van Kampen, *The Sign*, 244.

⁶⁶ Rosenthal, 254. Most of us think it more likely that the 24 elders represent the church rather than either Israel or angels.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 218. It seems more likely to us that the "saints" here (1 Thess. 3:13) are the same as those "who sleep in Jesus" (1 Thess. 4:14) since Paul, elsewhere in all of his epistles uniformly uses the term to represent *believers* rather than *angels*.

⁶⁸ Rosenthal, 185, 304. See also Van Kampen, *The Sign*, 295-301, 391. The Greek present tense (Rev 7:14) stresses that the great multitude "continually come" out of great Tribulation. This verb is a "present middle participle with the idea of continued repetition." A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1933) Vol. 6, p. 352. We believe that the church will be raptured instantaneously as one group whereas tribulation saints will go to heaven individually as they are martyred.

⁶⁹ Rosenthal, 237.

church for His earthly reign of 1000 years.

SUPPLEMENTARY READING

BOOKS AND BOOKLETS:

- Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, “A Review of *The Prewrath Rapture of the Church* by Marvin Rosenthal,” (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries, undated).
- Charles C. Ryrie, *Come Quickly, Lord Jesus, What You Need to Know About the Rapture*, Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1996).⁷⁰
- Gerald B. Stanton, *Kept from the Hour*, Revised edition (Miami Springs, FL: Schoettle Publishing Co., 1991).
- J. F. Strombeck, *First the Rapture*, (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1982).
- John F. Walvoord, *The Blessed Hope and the Tribulation*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976).
- John Walvoord, *The Rapture Question*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979).
- John Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1966).
- Mal Couch, General Ed., *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology* (Grand Rapid, MI: Kregel Publications, 1996).
- Paul S. Karleen, *The Prewrath Rapture of the Church: Is It Biblical?* (Langhorne, PA, BF Press, 1991).
- Renald E. Showers, *Maranatha Our Lord, Come! A Definitive Study of the Rapture of the Church* (Bellmawr, NJ: The Friends of Israel Ministry, Inc., 1995).
- Renald E. Showers, *The Prewrath Rapture View*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2001).

- Thomas Ice & Timothy Demy, general editors, *When the Trumpet Sounds: Today’s Foremost Authorities Speak Out on End-Time Controversies* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1995).
- Tim LaHaye and Thomas Ice, editors, *The End Times Controversy: The Second Coming Under Attack* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2003).
- Tim LaHaye, *No Fear of the Storm: Why Christians Will Escape All The Tribulation* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1992).

⁷⁰ An updated version of author’s, *What You Should Know About the Rapture*, (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1981).

ARTICLES:

- Gerald B. Stanton, “A Review of [Marvin Rosenthal] *The Prewrath Rapture of the Church*,” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 148:589 (Jan 91) 90-111.
- John A. McLean,⁷¹ “Another Look at Rosenthal’s ‘Prewrath Rapture,’” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 148:559 (Oct 91) 387-398.
- John W. Witmer, “Book Reviews” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 151:601 (Jan 94) 113-116 on Robert Van Kampen, *The Sign* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1992).
- John W. Witmer, “Periodical Reviews” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, (July-Sept 91) 358-359 on Marvin J. Rosenthal, “Imminence: Does the Bible Teach an Any-Moment Rapture?” *Zion’s Fire*, (Aug-Sep), 1990, 3-9.
- Mal Couch, “A Review of the Book *The Rapture Question Answered Plain & Simple*,”⁷² *Conservative Theological Journal* 1:3 (Dec. 1997), 235-253.
- Ron Graff, “[Pretribulation or Prewrath?](#)”
- Thomas Ice, “[The Three-Quarters Rapture Theory](#),” *Pre-Trib Perspectives*, 8:1, May 2003), 1, 4-5.
- Zane C. Hodges, A Review of Rosenthal, *The Prewrath Rapture of the Church*, *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*, Spring 1991, 83-87.

⁷¹ Associate Professor of Bible, Grand Rapids Baptist College and Seminary, Grand Rapids, Michigan. McLain’s article is his “effort to build on Stanton’s excellent critique of Rosenthal’s view” (BibSac, Jan. 91) by “supplementing it with additional observations and critiques of Rosenthal’s unusual view.”

⁷² The author is Robert Van Kampen.